

Weekly Legislative Update: **Forests**

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Bills We Opposed

SB 5961 Incentivizing the use of biochar in government contracts.

I testified in opposition to the bill as it is originally written because we have a concern that this bill is incentivizing a private company's efforts to develop a biochar/biomass plant in Port Angeles. The bill as introduced might allow harvesting trees to supply feedstock for the plant, rather than using logging slash, sawmill excess, or other wood waste. Regardless of the benefits of biochar, these biochar operations could lead to stripping massive amounts of vital organic material out of our forests. Two other organizations also asked that the bill not advance: Kitsap Environmental Coalition and 350 WA. [This article](#) reviews the pros and cons of biochar.

The bill passed the Senate unanimously, then passed the House 96 to 1. An amendment on the House floor narrowed the types of government-funded projects that state agencies and local governments are required to consider using the biochar products, tightened the criteria for complying biochar products, and reasserted that this biochar be derived from biomass waste materials. Thanks to all who signed in CON on this bill; we may have made a difference in the bill language that was passed by both chambers. It now awaits the governor's signature.

Bills We Supported

SB 5619 Conserving and restoring kelp forests and eelgrass meadows in Washington state. Bill had a public hearing on 1/20/22 in the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks Committee. It was referred to Senate Ways & Means on 1/28/22. The 2nd substitute bill passed the Senate unanimously. The bill also had strong support in the House committees, and passed the floor vote 96 to 1, and now awaits the governor's signature.

Comments: Both native and non-native types of eelgrass are essential for restoring Puget Sound and Coastal Washington. It is in these back eddies and sloping beaches where eelgrass provides shelter for migrating fish where they can escape diving ducks, seals and other predators. The loss in Puget Sound of any kind of eelgrass is partly responsible for the decline of Pacific salmon in our state. The goal to conserve and restore at least 10,000 acres of kelp and eelgrass meadows by 2040 should include both native and non-native species of eelgrass.

The House companion bill [HB 1661](#) did not proceed because the Legislature focused on the Senate bill.

Bills We Supported that did not pass

[HJR 4209](#) Adding a new section to the Washington state Constitution regarding the conservation and protection of the state's natural resources.

This bill did not proceed this session.

How You Can Be Involved

- Local Leagues in Washington have action chairs that coordinate action teams. Some local Leagues have environmental teams to take action locally. Contact your local League action chair to find out and join.
- You may also express your opinion on legislation with the LWVWA issue chairs. We will take your perspectives under considerations as we determine our support for legislation and prepare testimony. Sherri Dysart, Forests Issue Chair, sdysart@lwvwa.org.